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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA'S PRESIDENT SITES IRRESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENTS AS ROOT OF PROBLEMS

REF: A) LJUBLJANA 51 B) LJUBLJANA 80

Classified By: COM Thomas B. Robertson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Since suffering from cancer, and, so far, beating it, Slovenia's president Janez Drnovsek has adopted a simplified and more spiritual approach to life, which is apparent in his public life as well as in his personal demeanor. In the last two years, he has written three top ten best sellers with titles such as "Thoughts on Life" and "The Essence of the World." Ever the political animal, however, he has not lost his edge, and he is not one to be pushed around by the current ruling coalition. Taking the moral high ground in a recent lunch with COM, Drnovsek said he would not sacrifice his independence, nor that of Slovenia's institutions, by conferring with the parliament or government on suitable appointees for the Central Bank.

Drnovsek, not surprisingly, had a liberal dose of criticism for the current Government of Slovenia (GOS) accusing it of being more interested in gathering and retaining power than in governing justly. He doubted the GOS had a solid plan for its turn at the EU Presidency and questioned the abilities of many ministers to handle their EU portfolios - including the Foreign Minister. The President commented on his old political party, Liberal Democracy (LDS), saying though it might shrink some more, it would not disappear.

Nevertheless, he thought a space had been created for a truly centrist party to develop. He was coy about predicting who might lead this new party, but he was relatively confident it would be in a position to do well by parliamentary elections in autumn 2008. Drnovsek also demurred on the question of whether he would run for president again in autumn 2007, saying that as of now, the answer is no, thus leaving room for a change of heart.

¶2. (C) Summary Continued. In the same lunch Drnovsek commented on several high profile issues in which he has played or wanted to play a role including: Darfur, Kosovo (Serbia) and bilateral relations with Croatia. In each case, he faulted "irresponsible" governments for playing on nationalist emotions to manipulate situations for political gain rather than making difficult decisions and doing what was best for their citizens. End Summary.

¶3. (C) COM hosted Slovenia's President Janez Drnovsek and his International Affairs Advisor Ivo Vajgl for lunch on February 12. Polecon Chief also attended. Since being rebuffed on his forays into political issues (Kosovo and Darfur) and finding frustratingly little traction on bilateral issues with Croatia, Drnovsek has adopted a more spiritual approach to his role as Slovenia's president. He has taken the moral high ground in public discussions and on his personal website where he signs off as "Janez D." Drnovsek skipped the World

Economic Forum in Davos this year, calling it "all talk with no substance," and instead attended the conference on "Peace, Nonviolence and Empowerment in the 21st century" in New Delhi, India. His comment on India was that he hoped that it would be able to retain its spiritual foundations in the face of the rapid economic growth it was experiencing.

Darfur

¶4. (C) Drnovsek clearly still smarts from his experiences trying to broker some sort of breakthrough between the Sudanese government and various rebel factions in June 2006. He could not help but point out that eight months later, the situation in Darfur was not much better than when he had invited JEM to Ljubljana for talks, suggesting that the international community had failed as surely as he had. Nevertheless, Drnovsek also recognized his own naivet at the time, saying his old colleague from NAM days Al Bashir was an irresponsible leader who did not want to do what was best for his country and the rebel leaders were also "no angels" and had their own political agenda. Drnovsek agreed, too, that China, with its strong economic interests there, could and should do more to ameliorate the situation in Sudan.

Kosovo - Too Much Time Already Lost

¶5. (C) Turning to Kosovo, Drnovsek said that too much time had already been lost and there should be no further delay in giving Kosovo independence. After all, he asked rhetorically, "what would the Serbs do with Kosovo now,

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they've (already) had it" and he added it is "another government that does not take care of its own people." Drnovosek was skeptical that any Serbian government would be able to deal responsibly with Kosovo. He lamented the loss of intellectuals he believes Serbia has suffered over the last decade - leaving too much political space to nationalists and their destructive rhetoric. Drnovsek also rejected the idea that Kosovo independence would set a precedent for other disputed territories. He added that he thought Russia's decisions on Kosovo independence had more to do with its relationship with the United States than any sense of protection of Serbia.

Relations with Croatia

¶6. (C) Drnovsek reserved some of his deepest criticisms for the current governments and politicians of both Slovenia and Croatia. He said the GOS was making a serious error in judgment if it thought it could leverage Croatia's EU membership to get something on the ongoing border issues. First, he said, the EU will not appreciate this brinkmanship and second, it would do serious and long-term damage to their bilateral relationship. Drnovsek recalled that Italy had used similar tactics with Slovenia over the treatment of ethnic Italians, known as Optanti, at the end of WWII, which had delayed Slovenia's entry by over a year. And, unfortunately, suspicions about Italian motivations remain today to the detriment of bilateral relations. He warned that if Slovenia's politicians continued to "play with emotions" they could find themselves holding a referendum on Croatia's EU membership, which would be an absolute disaster. Drnovsek cited what he views as the GOS's mishandling of the relationship with Croatia as a major part of his disagreement with the Jansa government, although he appeared to think that Jansa himself had a pretty good grasp of the issues and the need to fix them. He joked that perhaps he had been too good a negotiator on the Drnovsek-Racan agreement, since the Croatian government had agreed to things it apparently could

not sell publicly.

¶ 17. (C) Drnovsek was equally critical of the Croatian government accusing it of being as irresponsible as the GOS for allowing the animosity to grow and in using the media to press domestic political advantage. He said Croatia was relying too much on Germany to get into the EU and that it was "not even trying" to negotiate the issues with Slovenia.

¶ 18. (C) Commenting on his canceled trip to Croatia (scheduled for February 15), Drnovsek explained he had originally been invited by President Mesic to go to Bjelovar to present his latest book "The Essence of the World." Then, the press more or less fabricated a meeting between them to discuss bilateral issues. Drnovsek said he decided to cancel the visit because while he had offered several ideas to Mesic after their last meeting in November, Mesic had never followed up. Drnovsek was not interested in another "empty" meeting. Responding to COM's query if he thought there was a way to solve this bilaterally, Drnovsek said that if Croatian PM Sanader came up with a "serious" proposal, he was certain Jansa would respond.

Central Bank Governor

¶ 19. (C) Turning to domestic issues, COM commented on press reports that President Drnovsek's most recent nominee for Bank of Slovenia (BOS) Governor, current Vice Governor, Andrej Rant, was his final offer, and if parliament did not confirm him, they should expect a crisis to ensue. Drnovsek responded that his original nominee and current Governor Mitja Gaspari was the obvious choice. He added that because of the nature of the institution, it was more important to have someone with the right professional qualifications rather than acceptable political affiliations. Despite parliament's rejection of Gaspari, Drnovsek said he did not see the need to consult with parliament on his choice, maintaining he "would not compromise (his) principles." He added that he wanted to avoid a "war" with the government and parliament and suggested he demonstrated his good will by withdrawing his second choice, Joze Mencingar (Ref B). Drnovsek said that he "listened to (PM Jansa) once" when he rejected Mencingar, and Rant was qualified for the job (implying he was done "listening").

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LDS or something new?

¶ 110. (C) COM reminded Drnovsek and Vajgl that they had given strong hints more than a year ago that Vajgl might look for a leadership role in the opposition Liberal Democracy Party (LDS). Both laughed this off and engaged in a little verbal ping-pong deciding who should be the one to comment on the current state of LDS. On the very public troubles of his former political party Drnovsek said he thought that the party would continue to shrink, but that it would ultimately survive, though as a minor political party. Drnovsek seemed confident that LDS's retreat from the center and the current GOS's skewing to the right opened a space for a true centrist party with strong social values and liberal economic policies. When pressed as to whom might head this new party, Drnovsek said he believed there would be some "old faces" but mostly new faces. Neither Drnovsek nor Vajgl would say anything more, other than that we could expect this party to emerge in the next few months and that it would be in a good position for the autumn 2008 elections. Commenting on other political developments, Drnovsek said of the Slovene People's Party (SLS) that "it could not survive just on Croatia as an issue" suggesting it would not do well in the next elections. He also thought Aljoz Peterle of New Slovenia (NSI) and currently in the European Parliament, would be returning to

Slovenia, and if he did not become president, he would "be looking for his political space." (Comment: Peterle has had political disagreements with current NSi president and Minister of Finance Andrej Bajuk, which suggest a possibility that he could lead a new party in Slovenia. End Comment)

The Presidency

¶11. (C) Slovenia's next major election is for President in autumn 2007 (date as yet undetermined). Drnovsek, some time ago, said publicly that he does not intend to run again. He has also hinted that his decision to not run is not final, thus leaving open the door to declare later this year. As of now, however, he is not running. Commenting on other potential contenders, Drnovsek echoed comments we have heard from other politicians and expressed disdain for Social Democrat Borut Pahor saying he had "no substance and no program."

Pessimism about Jansa Government

¶12. (C) Turning back to the work of the Jansa government and his relationship with the prime minister, Drnovsek expressed serious concerns about Jansa's approach to governing. Saying that Jansa is "just after power" Drnovsek suggested the prime minister should concentrate more on making friends not enemies because there just is not enough talent in Slovenia to clear all the old technocrats out of their jobs in order to put in someone more politically attractive. Further, Drnovsek expressed strong doubts about the GOS's ability to successfully manage the EU Presidency. He said Slovenia did not seem to have a strong program. Enlargement, he said, was on everyone's agenda, the constitution was not going to be solved by Slovenia, and as for intercultural dialogue, Drnovsek wanted to know what this government knew about that (clearly seeing himself as a more effective proponent on this topic). Drnovsek was particularly critical of the very weak Ministry of Agriculture which would have one of the most demanding portfolios during the EU presidency. He thinks Slovenia is "absolutely unprepared" to handle this complex issue, the previous minister was a catastrophe, and he had no indication that the newly nominated minister would be up to the challenge.

Comment

¶13. (C) Drnovsek, never physically robust, appeared thin but less frail than he has over the last two years. He did seem definitely to be healthier, his color was good and he was in a relatively upbeat mood. His sense of moral superiority was strongly evident as he described the political problems discussed over lunch as being due to the "irresponsibility" of all the governments concerned. Drnovsek did not comment on USG policies, even when prompted by COM on climate change

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or foreign direct investment. His silence was probably more out of good manners than a lack of opinion, which he expresses freely in the press. He had little positive to say about PM Janez Jansa, and he was clearly irked by the lack of weight his views and opinions apparently carry with this government, which is the reason he gave for no longer meeting regularly with the prime minister. Despite his protestations of not wanting to start a "war" with the government or parliament, Drnovsek also does not appear to be willing to fade into the role of compliant and beloved elder statesman. He still relishes power and authority as much as he did when he was prime minister, but with so many political outlets closed to him now, he seems to be recasting himself as the moral voice of Slovenia. His three books and solid public

support will allow him to carve out this place in the Slovenian polity. He must be very careful, however, not to take it too far and find himself an object of ridicule. Already, cartoons and commentary have appeared which indicate this is a real risk.

ROBERTSON